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מכון ויצמן למדע

THE WEIZMANN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE

REHOVOT · ISRAEL

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PROF. I. DOSTROVSKY
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נשיא בפועל

May 29th, 1973

Prof. Joshua Lederberg
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Dear Prof. Lederberg,

The main excitement at the Institute over the past month has, of course, been Ephraim Katzir's election as fourth President of Israel. I personally feel that it is particularly fitting that this young and developing nation, which bases so much of its economic progress and security on science and technology, will have a scientist at its helm. The modern image that he will help create for the State obviously far outweighs the Institute's loss of one of its most prominent scientists. Needless to say, some reflected glory accrues to us in having one of the Institute's founders elected to the highest office in the land.

At the beginning of April a special Israel-German Symposium on Physics took place in Rehovot, marking the tenth anniversary of the Minerva Program. Further symposia within the same framework will be held annually located, alternatively, in Rehovot and in Germany. The next symposium, on organic chemistry, is, therefore, to take place in Germany next year.

The Minerva Program was initiated ten years ago as an attempt to establish a normal cultural and scientific relationship between the young scientists of both nations. Today, I think we can safely say that it has been successful. The program is administered by a committee composed of an equal number of scientists from Germany and from the Institute - under the chairmanship of Prof. W. Gentner of the Max Planck Institute of Nuclear Physics at Heidelberg.

The Minerva Program operates by supporting research projects at the Weizmann Institute of Science which are of mutual interest to German and Israeli scientists. Recently it has also taken over

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the exchange-fellowship program through which scientists of both countries are encouraged to spend time in each other's laboratories. The program, financed by the German Federal Government through the Ministry of Research and Technology and the Max Planck Institute, has, in the ten years of its existence, already made available to the Institute some 45 million German marks. One notable feature is that it is administered with an impressive minimum of red tape. The cost of maintaining a scientist at the Institute has been agreed upon (it is updated from time to time), and the sum is transferred to the Institute with respect to each scientist working on an approved project. No detailed accounting or reporting is required.

Not unnaturally, the Minerva Program has led to some jealousy in other Israeli institutions, and the claim has been made that the Weizmann Institute "cornered" the entire field of the German Government's support of research here. While this claim is not entirely valid (e.g., the Hebrew University is receiving considerable German support) it has been consistently pressed in Germany itself by a number of Israeli institutions of higher learning with the result that Mr. Hans-Hilger Haunschild, State Secretary of the West German Ministry of Research and Technology, came here on a special mission to study the problem. His visit coincided with the Minerva Symposium and the Gentner Committee meetings (in which Mr. Haunschild participated). At the end of his visit he told me (and has since confirmed in writing) that it is his intention to "balance" the situation somewhat by supporting applied research projects at the other institutions in Israel, particularly environmental research and biomedicine. He assured us that this will not be done at the Institute's expense, but since all the funds derive from the same Ministry, some constraints on future increase in our support is to be expected. In this connection, one must bear in mind that the Minerva Program provides nearly 50% of our total income from research projects and grants.

Another matter that has preoccupied us in the last few months is the rapid rise in costs which affects virtually every item in our budget, and is completely beyond our control. While we can't do much about country-wide wage agreements or the cost of imported equipment and material - and these items control our running budget - we are now trying to do something about the building program by tailoring projects to available development funds.

As a further effort towards keeping the members of the Board and the circle of Institute friends and supporters throughout the world better informed, we have decided, starting this month, to publish a "Report from Rehovot", which will appear at regular intervals and will contain detailed information about major events at the Institute. Since it will have a fairly wide circulation, internal matters of concern only to members of our Board will not appear there but will continue to be included in my periodic letters to you.

Yours sincerely,


I. Dostrovsky